

programme. However, the removal of restrictions has not altered the overall rate of growth of imports. The growth rate of imports was 15.3% in 1993-94, 23.1% in 1994-95, 36.4% in 1995-96, 13.2% in 1996-97, 11% in 1997-98, 14.2% in 1998-99 and 13.6% in 1999-2000 (in Rs. terms). The import growth rate during the year 2000-2001 was only 5.59% in Rs. terms and 0.27% in US dollar terms. If non oil imports are taken into consideration the picture of imports is all the more reassuring. Such non oil imports, have in fact, registered a negative growth rate of 14.66% during 2000-2001.

Even at micro level the growth in imports have not been of alarming nature. The import data for 714 items, QRs on which were removed on 31.03.2000, for the year 2000-2001, indicates a growth in import of these items by less than 3%. Similarly, the import of 300 sensitive items, which is being monitored by a Standing Group of Secretaries, indicates a decline of 13% during the first three months of this financial year.

As can be seen from above, the fears of domestic market being swamped by imports have not come true. There is nothing to indicate that suicides as mentioned in the newspaper reports, if at all true, have any causal linkage with the removal of quantitative restrictions.

However, the imports are being constantly monitored and the Government is absolutely determined to ensure through appropriate use of tariff and other available mechanisms that imports do not cause any serious detriment or injury to domestic industry.

Hike in the price of postcard

1730. SHRIMATI SARLA MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to reconsider the 100 percent hike in the price of the ordinary postcard which is the medium of communication of common man; and

(b) if so, by when and to what extent?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) and (b) During the last 23 years, the postal rates for postcard was revised only twice *i.e.* on 1.6.1978 and on 1.6.1997. During this period the cost of providing this service has increased many times. The cost of providing postcard service for the year 2000-2001 (Projection) is about 580.39

paise as against the postal rate of 25 paise involving subsidy of about 96 per cent. Even after the revision of rate from 25 paise to 50 paise, the subsidy level will remain at about 91 per cent. Considering the high level of subsidy in providing this service, the present revision of rate is reasonable and there is no scope for any change.

International Telephone call racket at Gurgaon

1731. SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that telephone call rackets are working at metropolitan and big cities in connivance with a few working at telephone exchanges;
- (b) whether it is also a fact that an international call racket to receive calls illegally from United States by-passing the VSNL channel incurring a heavy revenue loss of India and US was detected in Gurgaon in the third week of April, 2001;
- (c) if so, the details thereof and the action taken in this regard; and
- (d) the steps Government have taken to unearth such rackets?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Some cases of misuse of STD/ISD and some other cases of illegal routing of incoming international calls by-passing the Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) Gateways have been detected.

- (b) and (c) An illegal setup for passing of international voice calls by-passing the Gateway of VSNL was unearthed on 20.3.2001 in Gurgaon wherein Income voice calls were being received through Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) and associated equipment and the same were being distributed to various subscribers through local telephone lines of Gurgaon Telephone Exchange. The Central Bureau of Investigation, have registered a regular case.
- (d) (i) Premises having Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) antenna and bulk telephone connections are kept under special watch.
- (ii) Threshold monitoring has been intensified in the telephone exchanges.
- (iii) Dedicated CBI Cells have been created in four metros exclusively for detecting and checking telecom related frauds.